

1 Kings 11:1-13, 26-43; 12:1-24

Aim of Lesson

To show how Solomon's disobedience and unfaithfulness to God resulted in the division of Israel, the rebellion of the people and the appointment of two wicked kings.

Background study

Exodus 34:14-17; Deuteronomy 17:17; 18:9-14; 1 Samuel 8:10-18; 12:14-15; 1 Kings 5:1-6:38; 9:15-19. Find maps of Palestine and surrounding countries.

Suggested outline of lesson

With the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon still fresh in the children's minds, emphasize how sad it was that Solomon, this wise, rich and powerful king, should, in the last years of his life, turn away from God. Having made alliances and trade agreements with foreign nations, Solomon saw fit to strengthen these bonds by marrying foreign princesses - Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, Hittites and the daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt. This was strictly against God's commands, and did not end there. Like all wrong actions, one error led to another. Solomon permitted his wives to continue their pagan practices and even had altars and temples built for their foreign gods. It was not long before he, too, was tempted to involve himself with their worship, while continuing, so he thought, to worship the true God. In fact, it is impossible to be obedient to the true God and, at the same time, worship false gods. Quote "You shall have no other gods before me", the very first commandment.

God was angry with Solomon and disappointed that, despite all the help and blessings he had given him, he had gone his own way and turned his back on God's laws. He had ignored what he knew to be right and become involved with wrongdoers. Solomon's behaviour had caused him to fail in his duty as God's king to guide his people correctly and, from that time on, the people of Israel tended towards idolatry. God spoke to Solomon in a very different way from that first communication when the young man had asked for wisdom and God had blessed him. Now God's anger was such that he told Solomon that his kingdom would be torn apart. God explained that this disaster would not take place until after Solomon's death. So Solomon's reign, which had begun so gloriously, ended in shame, and Israel's brief "golden era" was ended.

Besides angering God, Solomon had also lost the confidence and loyalty of the people. His vast building programme of palaces and temples, houses and stables, cities and ships had been achieved only by forcing the people to work extremely hard for him. Introduce Jeroboam, a hard-working and efficient man, whom Solomon promoted to be an overseer of a labour force. He saw the over-ambitious and self-indulgent projects of Solomon and the cruel effect the slave-like work had upon the people, and he resented Solomon's rule. Describe his encounter with the prophet Ahijah, and, using a paper coat, reproduce his action of tearing it into twelve pieces to illustrate the prophecy. Stress the words of warning in verse 38, which made the continuing reign of Jeroboam's family conditional, as always, upon obedience to the laws of God. When Solomon learned of Jeroboam's aspirations, he threatened his life. Jeroboam was forced to flee to Egypt, there to await God's time for the promise to be fulfilled.

Explain to the children that at the death of Solomon, his own son, the prince Rehoboam, was naturally due to become the next king. So, after king Solomon had died, Rehoboam assembled the people in order to declare himself king. But he was not popular, and the people were unwilling to accept him as their king without some reassurance that he would discontinue the harsh regime imposed by his father. They needed a spokesman to put their case. Jeroboam, who had returned home as soon as he had learned of the death of Solomon, was ready and willing to champion the people.

Describe the scene in the palace where the wise, old advisers, who had seen the mistakes of Solomon, tried to guide Rehoboam into attempting to win back the respect of the people. Unfortunately the proud prince listened to his contemporaries, who were as hot-headed as himself. Ask the children which advice he should have taken, and why. Explain that he made up his own mind about taking the wrong advice, and that his decision helped to bring about what God had planned, because God knew beforehand what sort of man he was and what he would decide to do. His clumsy and cruel response to the people's appeal served to swing the loyalty of nearly all the tribes from Solomon's son to Jeroboam, whom they appointed as their king. These ten tribes formed the northern kingdom of Israel, whilst Rehoboam retained only Judah, Benjamin and the priests. Rehoboam wanted to fight to regain the whole kingdom, but God sent a prophet to him with a message explaining that this division of the kingdom was God's doing and he was not to fight against it.

Even in the days of Saul, Israel and Judah had been regarded as separate parts of the kingdom (see 1 Samuel 11:8), but Saul, David and Solomon had united the people. Use a map to show that during the reign of Solomon the kingdom of Israel had reached its greatest extent. From this time on, the nation was divided, and so began a period of bitter hatred and trouble for God's people. Even though Jeroboam had known the reasons for Solomon's downfall, he too chose to lead the people astray by doing the same wrong things and encouraging the people to turn away from God. He accepted the God-given responsibility, but rejected the counsel of God that had accompanied the prophecy. His name became a byword: "Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 22:52). It is ironic that, in choosing Jeroboam, whom they thought would be a better leader than Rehoboam, the people acquired one of the most wicked of their leaders.

Relevance to the children's lives

Solomon became so disobedient that God was very angry with him. Can you say where he first began to go wrong? He thought there was no harm in marrying a princess who did not believe in God, because he was sure this would not affect him. He thought he knew better than God, who had told his people never to do this.

Do you think, sometimes, that there is no harm in doing what you have been told not to do? (e.g. not to walk on the grass in the park, not to kick a ball in the house, not to leave your toys on the floor, etc.) If you love your parents you will do as they say, because you trust them to know what is good for you and for the family, and because there is usually a very good reason for the instructions.

Worksheets

When placed in the correct order, the words read 'Solomon turned his heart away from the Lord, who became angry and said "I will give your kingdom to one of your servants, but for the sake of David and Jerusalem I will do this after you die, and will leave your son one tribe".'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we praise you for your wisdom and love. We ask you to help us to obey the rules we are given, and not to argue about them or ignore them. Amen.

Memory verse

"If both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the Lord your God, it will be well" (1 Samuel 12:14).